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SF PERUSALS

HERITAGE

by Stephen Churchett

SAMUEL FRENCH

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www.samuelfrench.co.uk
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For Amateur Production Enquiries

United Kingdom and World
excluding north america
plays@samuelfrench.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

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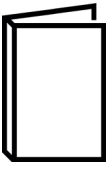
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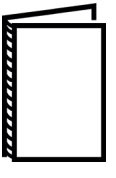
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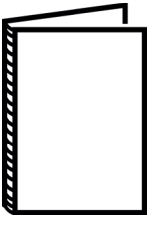
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Tom and Clem

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen adapted Raymond Briggs' book *Ethel & Ernest* for ACT Productions and the Ambassador Theatre Group. The production opened at Nottingham Playhouse, directed by Giles Croft. Stephen's first play, *Tom & Clem*, opened at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford before transferring to the Aldwych Theatre. It was produced by Michael Codron, directed by Richard Wilson, and starred Michael Gambon and Alec McCowen. *Tom & Clem* was nominated for the Laurence Olivier Awards in the category of Best New Play. *Heritage* opened at Hampstead Theatre before a short tour and starred George Cole, Gwen Taylor and Tim Pigott-Smith.

Heritage had its first performance at Hampstead Theatre (Artistic Director, Jenny Topper), by arrangement with Michael Codron, on 2 December 1997, and was subsequently presented by Michael Codron and Lee Dean. The cast was as follows:

HARRY	George Cole
GEORGE	Tim Pigott-Smith
RUPE	Gideon Turner
MAY	Gwen Taylor
GINNY	Judy Flynn

Director	Mark Rayment
Designer	Johan Engels
Lighting Designer	Howard Harrison
Sound Designer	John A. Leonard

CHARACTERS

HARRY

GEORGE

RUPE

MAY

GINNY

For Sue and Toby

ACT ONE

Scene One

Spring. Afternoon. Part of a formally informal garden. An asphalt path runs from one side of the stage to the other. On the grass a wooden park bench faces the path. A litter bin is near by. The trunk of an old tree is a short distance from the bench which is overhung by a bough. Behind the bench the grass slopes gently and irregularly upwards, dotted with shrubs and bushes, beyond which can be glimpsed the red brick of a grand late seventeenth-early eighteenth-century building. A football rolls into view. From another direction, **HARRY** *enters. He is in his mid-seventies, wearing the blue sergeant's uniform of an in-pensioner at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. He is carrying a newspaper. He calls in the direction from which the ball came.*

HARRY There is a notice. *(He kicks the ball back, starts to turn away, then turns back, putting up two fingers.)* Yes, you too, son.

He moves to the tree, places both hands on the trunk, and stands looking up into the branches. **GEORGE** *enters. He's in his early fifties, wearing a suit and carrying a small closed umbrella.*

GEORGE You'll get stuck. It'll be the fire brigade.

HARRY Hello, boy. What day is it?

GEORGE Tuesday.

HARRY Thought it was. You should have said.

GEORGE I can drop in, can't I?

HARRY Of course, boy. Nice to see you.

They embrace.

Does it mean you're not coming Friday?

GEORGE Lunch, yes. Pub again?

HARRY See how I feel. If we can get a seat outside.

GEORGE We'll go early.

HARRY You're very spruced up. Suit?

GEORGE Something I had to come up for. Thought I'd drop by.

HARRY Shoes could do with a polish. What's that? Mud?

GEORGE It was still raining this morning. I looked for you in the snooker room. Tuesday.

HARRY Not today. Got a visitor. Rupert's coming.

GEORGE Are you sure?

HARRY I'm not gaga.

GEORGE No. May didn't say, that's all.

HARRY When?

GEORGE I...spoke to her. This morning.

HARRY Oh.

GEORGE That'll be a first, won't it?

HARRY What?

GEORGE Rupe coming to see you alone, without his mother.

HARRY Something to do with college. He's bringing a tape recorder.

GEORGE I'd have thought he'd know your stories backwards by now.

HARRY Who says I'm going to tell my stories?

GEORGE It'll be his "verbal interaction module" or some such thing.

HARRY He wants to know about getting old. Being old.

GEORGE Can't he wait? Find out for himself?

HARRY I don't mind, if it helps the lad. It's for his course.

GEORGE Be nice if he'd come and see you when he doesn't want something, that's all.

HARRY Be fair, boy. How often did you go and see my old man, unless me or your mother took you?

GEORGE I suppose. Didn't I really?

HARRY You said you didn't like the smell. "Old man smell", you used to say.

GEORGE The house. Not him. Did I? God, sorry.

HARRY No need. Just don't think bad of Rupert.

GEORGE I only see him at Christmas, anyway.

HARRY May says she's always asking you over. You never go.

GEORGE Well. What *were* you doing with the tree?

HARRY Just touching. Feeling. It's only a hundred and fifty.

GEORGE Only?

HARRY I'd have put it older.

GEORGE You've seen the papers?

HARRY Is that why you came?

GEORGE I just dropped in, that's all. Coincidence.

HARRY They can't take it any higher. That's it.

GEORGE I'm sorry.

HARRY This is the first to go. These gardens. Underground car park.

GEORGE I saw.

HARRY They'll have their work cut out, with some of them roots.

GEORGE You'll still have the other gardens.

HARRY No trees, though.

GEORGE Nearer for you.

HARRY I don't have trouble walking. Yet. Not like some of them.

GEORGE No.

HARRY We lost Ronnie the week before last.

GEORGE Oh, dear. Sorry. Did I know him?

HARRY Yes, you remember Ronnie. You had a drink with him last year. Founder's Day. Geordie.

GEORGE With big side-whiskers. Yes.

HARRY Ninety-one. Very sudden. He always was a lucky bugger. I wonder how long it'll take?

GEORGE What?

HARRY Before we're all gone. Last admissions this year, no more after that.

GEORGE It'll be years.

HARRY I know it'll be years. The question is, how many?

GEORGE Years, that's all.

HARRY They're going to wait until they can fit us all into North East Wing before they start on the big work.

GEORGE You said.

HARRY We drop off the twig one by one until they can fit us all in there.

GEORGE It might be a nice change for you, different wing.

HARRY There's over twenty different trees in here, different kinds.

GEORGE What's that one, coming into blossom? You can just see it through there.

HARRY Hawthorn.

GEORGE Yes.

HARRY That's why we called your sister "May". Another name for it.

GEORGE I'd forgotten.

HARRY You're getting old.

GEORGE Oh, thanks.

HARRY Used to be a great profusion of hawthorn near the old house when we were there. Your mother loved the May blossom. Used to put it in jars all over the place. Remember that? Remember saving all the jam jars?

GEORGE I think so.

HARRY Couldn't move for them this time of year. On the landing, in the kazi, the scullery, up the shed. Came on leave once and she'd tied some on the front-door knocker.

GEORGE I do remember. I used to help her. "Let's do a nice arrangement." I'd forgotten.

HARRY That's something I can tell Rupert. That you start to remember things from further back.

GEORGE Make sure you don't forget.

HARRY Bit of respect, you. How's business?

GEORGE We haven't opened much lately.

HARRY Been buying?

GEORGE A few sales, house clearances. Local, mostly.

The sound of an approaching helicopter.

HARRY Up for a sale today? Good stuff? Any joy?

GEORGE No.

HARRY How's your mate?

GEORGE He has got a name.

HARRY Yes, I know. All right. Stephen.

The helicopter is now overhead.

GEORGE Stefan.

HARRY What?

They both look up and wait until the noise diminishes.

What?

GEORGE His name's Stefan. Just once, Dad.

HARRY Sorry. Yes. All right.

GEORGE Bloody things. Talk about noisy neighbours. Why can't they go by car or train like anyone else?

HARRY They have to be places ruddy sharpish, the top brass from there. Probably going somewhere hush-hush.

GEORGE Probably going to the golf club.

HARRY You old cynic.

GEORGE That's what I used to say to you.

HARRY You got that off your mother. That's what she used to call *me*.

GEORGE Not without reason.

HARRY A realist, that's what I am. Have to be, with what's going on now. Jake was here last week.

GEORGE He's started now, hasn't he? Yes, May said she'd tell him to find you and say hello.

HARRY *I* saw *him* first. With some of the big-wigs, over by the chapel.

GEORGE Carrying his theodolite at a jaunty angle, no doubt.

HARRY He had someone with him for that.

GEORGE He would, now.

HARRY A theodolite wallah.

GEORGE Yes. *(He laughs longer than one might expect, then suddenly goes to the tree and places both hands on it, looking upwards.)* There *is* something about them.

HARRY They last. And they make sure *we* do. That's why I had your mother buried near a tree. That's why I want to be next to her. Or scattered. Whatever you decide. I'll leave it up to you.

GEORGE Dad.

HARRY Good fertilizer, that's what it comes down to, George. You feed the earth. The roots of the tree feed on the soil. The tree grows. It gives off carbon dioxide. That mixes with oxygen. Someone breathes in, near the tree, they're breathing in some of you. Even if they're miles away they'll still get a tiny bit of you, even just a tiny little bit. See? That's how we last. That's my theory, anyway, and I'm sticking to it.

GEORGE What's brought this on?

HARRY What?

GEORGE You've never talked about this before.

HARRY You don't, do you?

GEORGE You're all right?

HARRY Constitution of the proverbial, that's what the quack said last time.

GEORGE Good.

In the distance a clock chimes the quarter hour.

What time's Rupe due?

HARRY He's a bit late.

A mobile phone rings. **GEORGE** *looks around to see where it is.* **HARRY** *produces the phone from his pocket.*

Christmas. From May and Jake. Bang up to date, your old man. Tiny little gizmo.

GEORGE Answer it, then.

HARRY *does.*

HARRY *(to phone)* O three seven four two three six one nine two…speaking…talk of the devil…no matter…got your Uncle George here at the moment…oh, he's fine…see you in a minute then…oh, Rupert, we're outside, it being so nice, in the gardens, so come in the London Gate, the bench opposite the popular tree, remember? …I know, but that's what you used to call it…yes, don't you remember? …right-oh. *(He hangs up.)* He's at the station, just walking down. Stuck in a tunnel for twenty minutes. I thought he'd remember about the popular tree. It was the one he could never get right. You remember that?

GEORGE Vaguely.

HARRY Got all the others off pat, even the tricky ones, but he always said "popular". Eight, was he?

GEORGE I don't know.

HARRY Might have been nine.

GEORGE Could have been, yes.

HARRY No. Eight, I reckon.

GEORGE Anyway.

HARRY Well, we can work it out. I was sixty-five when I lost your mother. So, twelve off…how old's he now?

GEORGE Lost track. Nineteen, I suppose.

HARRY That'd make him seven. He was more than seven.

GEORGE If you say so.

HARRY He can't be nineteen then.

GEORGE I think he is, actually. He's in his second year. Birthday's in October, isn't it?

HARRY Yes, 'cause I always send him a card.

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